

quick facts

About... *Influenza*

What is influenza?

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Although anyone can become infected with influenza, the elderly, young children, and people with certain other health conditions are at greater risk of developing more severe illness or complications of influenza, such as pneumonia. Every year, more than 36,000 Americans die from influenza-related complications.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza is spread by respiratory droplets from close contact with infected persons or from contact with contaminated surfaces or objects. Infection can occur when influenza viruses contact the eyes, mouth, or nose, and possibly through inhaling droplets from a sneeze or cough. People may become infected by touching surfaces or objects contaminated with influenza viruses and then touching their eyes, mouth, or nose. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others from about one day **before** symptoms onset up to five days **after** becoming sick. **That means that you may be able to spread influenza before you become sick, as well as while you are sick.**

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Symptoms usually include:

- Fever (usually high)
- Chills
- Headache
- Dry Cough
- Runny/Stuffy Nose
- Sore Throat
- Muscle Aches
- Extreme Tiredness

Symptoms usually start about 1-4 days following exposure and last 2-7 days.

How do I know if I have influenza?

See your health care provider to determine if you have influenza. Your health care provider may swab your throat to obtain a culture for laboratory testing.

How is influenza treated?

If you get the flu, get plenty of rest, drink a lot of liquids, and avoid using tobacco and alcohol. You can also take medications, such as acetaminophen, to reduce fever and relieve muscle aches. ***Never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms.*** If the diagnosis is made at the very beginning of the illness, a doctor may prescribe an antiviral medication.

How can I protect myself from influenza?

The best protection is to get a flu vaccination every year before flu season starts. Since influenza viruses change over time, it is important to get a flu shot each year. Each year, the vaccine contains the types of flu virus expected to cause illness in the coming year. The vaccine begins to protect you within a few days after vaccination, but the vaccine is not fully effective until about 14 days after vaccination.

Good respiratory hygiene is important to prevent the spread of ALL respiratory infections, including influenza:

- Use your elbow or upper arm (instead of your hands) or a tissue to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. Immediately dispose of used tissue..
- To clean your hands after coughing or sneezing, wash with soap and water, or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner if water is not available.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- If you get influenza, stay home from work, school, and social gatherings. This will help prevent the spread of your illness to others and will give your body the rest it needs to recover.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. Many diseases are spread this way.

Who should get the vaccine (flu shot)?

Although everyone should receive a flu shot each year, certain people are at greater risk for developing a serious case of the flu or its complications and are recommended for a flu shot:

- Children aged 6-59 months (until the 5th birthday)
- People aged 50 years and older
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions
- People who live in long-term care facilities
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from influenza, including:

- Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from influenza (see above)
- Household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age (children younger than 6 months are too young to be vaccinated)
- Health care workers

People who have had a severe allergic reaction to eggs or to a previous flu shot **or** have had a history of [Guillain-Barré syndrome](#) (GBS) should NOT get a flu shot.

Influenza vaccine protects against three different influenza viruses. The vaccine comes in two forms. One is the traditional vaccine given in the arm, and the second is a nasal mist. The mist vaccine (FluMist) should be used to immunize:

- health care workers working in direct patient care (if not in contact with people with weakened immune systems)
- healthy individuals 5-49 years of age in close contact with infants 0-6 months of age (household contacts or out-of-home caregivers).

For additional information on influenza, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web site at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>.

Last reviewed on April 17, 2007